

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO *

EXCERPTS FROM OUR STATE MEDICAL JOURNAL

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From some editorial notes:

... Rats.—In the November issue the journal published an article by Doctor Currie on "Rats" and their relation to the spread of contagious disease. . . . The public health authorities in charge of the work of cleaning up Chinatown are doing all that they can to get rid of the rats, but with comparatively little result. The rats seem to be, if anything, increasing in numbers, and every month specimens are found from which the bacillus pestis is isolated. During the month of October there were five deaths from plague; in November there were several more. . . .

... Dr. Gould Criticized.—The *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* published an excellent article by Dr. George M. Gould on the "Ill Health of Francis Parkman," in which Doctor Gould demonstrated, to the satisfaction of any ordinary individual, the fact that Parkman's ill health was almost undoubtedly due to uncorrected eyestrain. The *Boston Journal* thought Doctor Gould somewhat of a "crank" on this subject of eyestrain, and editorially told him so in the most polite of Bostonese. . . . "We must, therefore, reiterate our opinion that Doctor Gould is an extremist in his advocacy of a *theory which unquestionably stands on a basis of scientific fact.*" (Italics ours.) Doctor Gould ought certainly to be satisfied with that; in the course of time probably Boston will advocate a theory that has a "basis of scientific fact." Perhaps the thing that rankles is the possibility that the population of Boston may not have been quite accurately refracted, and that a change of glasses may be necessary!

... A Title of Honor.—The title "doctor" was originally used to signify teacher in general, but in about the twelfth century it became a title of honor for the learned, irrespective of teaching. . . . Unfortunately in this day of easily acquired titles there is danger of the ancient and cherished title of doctor losing much of its distinction. . . .

... School Children's Eyes.—The journal publishes this month an exceedingly interesting document. It is a circular or leaflet of instruction to school teachers concerning the importance of, and the method to be used in, examining the eyesight of school children. This leaflet has been prepared by the Superintendent of Schools of Los Angeles. . . . Ventilation, sufficient space, illumination, etc., and all questions of general sanitation are now matters of routine consideration by the architect and the school board. But the eyes of the pupil—upon which depend, one may say, the whole future life of the individual—must be considered by the specialist, or first by the teacher under instructions from the specialist.

... The New Constitution and By-Laws.—In this issue will be found the first installment of the proposed new constitution and by-laws, recommended by the special committee of five on that subject, appointed under a resolution passed by the House of Delegates at the last meeting of the state society. . . . As the whole scheme of reorganization along the broad lines advocated by the American Medical Association is involved, you are most earnestly requested to give this matter your very careful reading and digestion. The committee believes that, in many ways, the old constitution and by-laws is a superior document to that recommended by the American Medical

Association, but it contains certain basic differences which are entirely at issue with the general scheme of organization, and hence must be radically altered.

From an article on "Decapsulation of the Kidney for Chronic Bright's Disease" by George Goodfellow, M. D., and G. L. Eaton, M. D.:

... The rapid introduction of alleged new remedial measures, medical and surgical, during the past few decades, with resulting claims for their efficiency is remarkable and startling—so startling, in fact, that one naturally is led to inquire into their utility. . . . My purpose in this foreword is not to descant upon philosophy, but to call attention to the fact that there is unity in this universe of ours, and that we cannot make separate entities of diseases for purposes of treatment. Each must be looked upon as part of a general whole, the variations of which may for investigation be temporarily labeled. The rapid reversion to therapeutical methods that have been derided for many, many years as irrational, unscientific and brutal, particularly in glandular therapy, is noteworthy. Likewise, many surgical procedures can claim parentage from the time that the shawm and sackbut were used near the Willows of Babylon, and the morning song of Memnon arose to the sun. . . . The foregoing is apropos of an operation for the relief of a complex disease that has been written about much of late, and more recently discussed with a mild degree of acrimony, at a meeting of the County Medical Society of San Francisco, the so-called Edebohl's operation for "decapsulation of the kidney for chronic Bright's disease." . . .

From an article on "Puerperal Septicemia" by R. A. Whiffin, M. D., San Jose:

... This is a disease that has probably existed almost as long as the human race, yet one that has not been understood until comparatively recent times. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1843 made a strong plea for care in attending cases of confinement after attending autopsies or cases of erysipelas, but it fell to the lot of Semmelweis of Vienna, in 1847, to discover that which Doctor Holmes suspected as a fact, and to him we owe our first real knowledge of the causes of puerperal septicemia. It was not exactly an accidental discovery, but was made by comparing the symptoms of the fatal illness of Professor Koletchka of Vienna, which illness was caused by a wound he received while dissecting, with those of puerperal septicemia, which they resembled. This resemblance made Semmelweis think there might be a connection between the two diseases, and to prove it he made all his students who were working in the dissecting room wash their hands in chlorin water before examining a pregnant woman, and by so doing reduced the mortality from septicemia among women confined by his students from 11.4 per cent to 1.27 per cent, which was certainly proof that unclean hands carried the disease. Without knowing it Semmelweis anticipated Lister and Pasteur in practical antiseptis. . . .

From an article on "The Prevention of Perineal Lacerations" by Edward N. Ewer, Oakland:

... This paper is not written for the purpose of exploiting any special method for the prevention of perineal lacerations, but rather to call attention to the bearing upon the subject of certain more or less neglected obstetric procedures. . . .

From an article on "Infectious Pulmonary Edema—Preliminary Report" by W. Ophüls, M. D., San Francisco:

... While I was studying mixed infections in pulmonary tuberculosis, I met with a condition which, to the naked eye, had all the appearances of an acute pulmonary edema such as we are accustomed to see in cases of disturbance of the circulation in the lungs. . . .

* This column aims to mirror the work and aims of colleagues who bore the brunt of state society work some twenty-five years ago. It is hoped that such presentation will be of interest to both old and recent members.